



THE BARKING GECKO

Newsletter of the NamibRand Nature Reserve



March 2013

Volume 14 N° 1

... a thirsty land

We hope 2013 has started off well for you! As can be expected, the "hot" topic at present is rainfall. Unlike the past few good-to-exceptional years, the results to date have been well below the average (around 70-80 mm), but in line with those in the rest of Namibia, where drought conditions are also being experienced in many areas. Up to recently our totals ranged from 0.1 mm (NaDEET Base) to 9.5 mm (Keerweder), 14 mm (Porcupine) and 31 mm (Toskaan). A hailstorm struck the recently burnt area on the dunes near Kwessiegat on 23 March 2013, with 17 mm of rain. Locals predicted (correctly) that, as the weather starts to cool, we may receive some of the traditionally late Namib rains. This took the form of a dramatic dust storm on 30 March, followed by drenching rains of up to 21 mm over the whole of the Reserve. The "green flush" has already started, with the promise of some better grazing to take us into the winter months.

Despite this hot, dry summer, life on NamibRand continues, both for animals and the people whose lives are so inextricably linked. We would like to thank all our supporters—landowners, concessionaires, partners, neighbours and friends—for your invaluable support for NamibRand and your ongoing commitment to our conservation activities.

Ann Scott



Photo: Nad Brain

A huge dust storm approaching the Keerweder airstrip from the west on 30 March 2013 completely covers Jagkop and the surrounding plains—but brings welcome, drenching rains of 14-21 mm.



Photo: Ann Scott

Desert-adapted species such as oryx (gemsbok) are able to survive dry conditions by feeding on seemingly unpalatable dry grasses.

In this issue:

Editorial	1
News from our CEO	2
Kgotla at Kwessiegat	4
Sky watching	5
Large lightning fire in the dunes	6
News from the South	7
Impressions of my internship at NamibRand	8
Practical experience at NamibRand	8
'Little Bugs' news	9
Welcome to the Family Hideout, Titus!	9
Guide and rangers' corner	10
News@NaDEET.....	11
What does our wedge-snouted lizard have in common with the Sinai agama?.....	12
Large carnivores in Central Namibia: conflict, management and ecology	13
Distribution and conservation of the black-footed cat	14
Interesting sightings and photo gallery	15

News from the CEO

Namibia and the NamibRand Nature Reserve are at the forefront of conservation through the innovative and ground breaking work that is being done with regard to large landscape conservation. On 16 March 2013, landowners and custodians of properties that make up the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape signed a constitution that legalises this representative body and approved the management plan that will guide the work and outputs of this co-management association.

The eyes of the international conservation community are on us now to see if we can implement our vision to manage the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape collaboratively for enhanced landscape and biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic development, for the sustained benefit of the people within the Landscape and the Region.

This initiative, which had already started in 2007 between NamibRand and some of our neighbours, including the Kulala Wilderness Reserve, Sossusvlei Lodge and the Namib Desert Lodge, is the first time that a public-private partnership concentrating on large landscape conservation has been formalised in Namibia. In addition to this we know of very few examples in the world where conservation initiatives on this scale have been successfully attempted. The area now under collaborative management extends to almost one million hectares!

This partnership does not mean that individual landowners will be told how and when to do what on their own land; rather it focuses on the things we can do better as a group. Matters such as landscape-wide wildlife monitoring, the opening of fences to re-enable historic wildlife migrations, joint water management plans, fire and security issues, marketing and social issues can all be addressed.

We are excited at the prospect of working with our neighbours in making this project a success and will report to you on a regular basis on the progress that is being achieved.



Photo: Dylann Dentlinger

Congratulations to our ranger, Quintin Hartung, and Vanessa Mouton on their engagement!

Our ranger extraordinaire, Quintin Hartung, has found his soul mate and is now engaged to Vanessa Mouton. Their wedding is set to take place on 4 May 2013, after which Vanessa will be joining the NamibRand team in June 2013. She will be based at Keerweder with Quintin as an Environment and Research Warden. I have every confidence that this partnership will continue to take NamibRand to new heights. Congratulations to Quintin and Vanessa and we wish them every happiness together and on NamibRand.

The NamibRand Nature Reserve was fortunate to receive a donation of 27 solar panels from the French owned company InnoSun (see <http://innosun.org>). These solar panels have been installed in two sets.

(Continued on p3)



Photo: Michael Sibetani

Participants at the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape AGM at Sossusvlei Lodge on 16 March 2013.



Photo: Nils Odendaal

The new solar array at Kweessiegat, part of a generous donation by InnoSun.



Riekus Verwey and the team installing the new Keerweder solar array.

(Continued from p2)

The first set of 14 solar panels was installed at an important borehole at Kwessiegat. The power harnessed through this installation now ensures that water is regularly pumped for wildlife in the area, eliminating the need to use diesel as a source of energy for that water pump.

The remaining photovoltaic panels have been harnessed to our existing solar-diesel power plant at Keerweder. This additional sustainable alternative energy has enabled Keerweder to be almost 100% fossil fuel free! Diesel is now only used at our headquarters to pump water or as a back-up to generate electricity when the skies are cloudy.

We would like to thank InnoSun sincerely for their generous support to us and in supporting our work towards biodiversity conservation in Namibia. Thank you also to Riekus Verwey from Maltahöhe Auto and Electric for his expertise in installing the new solar systems for us.

We are sad to report that Richard Matthews, a world-renowned photographer of Wild Images who visited NamibRand in August-September 2012, passed away tragically



Richard Matthews—a memorial and a celebration of an extraordinary photographer.



Earth Touch have been filming a documentary on the biodiversity of the desert—including capturing the fascinating action of the sidewinding adder (Péringuey's adder; above) in the dunes at Kwessiegat with the help of reptile expert, Stuart Hebbard.

during an aircraft accident in March 2013. Mark Berry, a well known Namibian conservationist and pilot, also passed away in this unfortunate accident. We share our sincere condolences with their families.

Earth Touch has been busy filming an exciting documentary on desert biodiversity, which includes many of the "dune specials" such as the dancing white lady spider, scorpions, Namib dune (palmato) gecko and sidewinder (Péringuey's adder). There will be more on this story in the next issue.

There are some exciting developments in terms of new tourism products on the NamibRand Nature Reserve. We are exploring the possibility of establishing a Stargazing Observatory in partnership with Stargazing Adventures Namibia. If this proposal is approved it will complement our International Dark Sky Reserve status and provide a world class facility to guests, amateur astronomers and research astronomers. A possible horse riding concession application from Namibia Horse Safaris in partnership with NamibRand Safaris/Wolwedans is also being evaluated. The international trend in tourism shows a strong shift towards more and more adventure-based tourism. By considering these new options the NamibRand Board of Directors is positioning the tourism products on the Reserve towards a more sustainable economic outlook. We will keep you posted on these developments.

Nils Odendaal



Photo: Liz Treston

The NamibRand "family" was well represented at the end-of-the-year Kgotla at Kwessiegat in December 2012.

Kgotla at Kwessiegat

Kwessiegat was an idyllic venue for our end-of-the-year Kgotla on 7 December 2012, with a high level of participation.

Amongst the topics discussed were the dry season Birding Big Day on 23-24 November 2012, when 47 species were recorded (28% of the possible 170 species on the Reserve); and the new bird atlas project, which will entail a more intensive approach than the first project but provide more accurate data.

N/a'an ku sê reported that the collars of three cheetahs were still functioning. The results of the June 2012 game count, the game capture in October 2012 and recent/planned research activities were discussed.

General management matters included an update on the International Dark Sky project and the NAM-PLACE project; rainfall monitoring; water installations; roads, driving and vehicles; communication and radio procedures; aircraft and fire procedures; training/courses; guide/ranger meetings; and new developments.

Concessionaires provided a news update on their activities, and Alessandro Araldi made a comprehensive presentation on the activities of N/a'an ku sê throughout the past year.

Everyone was thanked for their enthusiastic participation, with special thanks to Chris Berker for providing the magnificent venue at Kwessiegat; to Sossusvlei Desert Lodge for the excellent catering provided by Ewan Neveling and his team, Ruth Sikopo and Hango Shikongo; to Quintin Hartung for the organising and logistics, and to his fiancée Vanessa Mouton for her help with the arrangements.

Ann Scott



Photos: Ann Scott

*Above: Master braaiers Quintin Hartung (left) and Ewan Neveling.
Below: Participants enjoying the cool of the evening at Kwessiegat.*

Sky watching



In early April, staff from the NamibRand and NaDEET are planning to make an evening tour of the area surrounding the Reserve to locate and document sources of light pollution. In addition, all

properties on the Reserve will be requested to perform an inventory of their exterior lights. These actions are required to maintain the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) certification of the NamibRand as an International Dark Sky Reserve.

The Reserve continues to serve as a resource for other parks and reserves in Africa who hope to gain Dark Sky Places status for their locations. The !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park is beginning their lighting upgrade and is on schedule to submit their application for Dark Sky Park status this year. South African National Parks (SANParks) will be beginning preliminary steps towards certification for their five arid parks in the near future. Initial contacts have also been made with a group in Ethiopia.

Because of its dark sky, NamibRand will be a great place to view the following astronomical events that will occur during the next four months.

April 14 - Conjunction of the Moon and Jupiter. Conjunctions are rare events where two or more objects appear extremely close together in the night sky. This night the Moon will pass about two degrees (four Moon diameters) from Jupiter in the evening sky. Look for them in the west after sunset.

April 21, 22 - Lyrids Meteor Shower. The Lyrids shower produces about 20 meteors per hour at its peak. The meteors are dust particles left behind by comet C/1861 G1 Thatcher. The shower runs annually from April 16-25, peaking this year on the night of the 21st and morning of the 22nd. These meteors can sometimes produce bright dust trails that last for several seconds. The nearly full moon will be a problem this year, blocking out all but the brightest meteors. The meteors will radiate from the constellation Lyra, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

April 25 - Partial Lunar Eclipse. A partial lunar eclipse occurs when a portion of the Moon passes through the darkest part of the Earth's shadow. During this eclipse only the very northern edge of the full moon will seem to disappear. The eclipse will begin at 8:54 PM and end at 9:21 PM.

April 28 - Saturn at Opposition. The ringed planet will be at its closest to Earth, offering the best viewing. A medium-sized or larger telescope will allow you to see Saturn's rings and a few of its brightest moons.

May 4, 5 - Eta Aquarids Meteor Shower. This shower, consisting of dust particles left behind by comet Halley, may produce up to 60 meteors per hour at its peak. The shower runs annually from April 19 to May 28. It peaks this year on the night of May 4 and the morning of May 5. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Aquarius, but can appear anywhere in



Photo: Quintin Hartung

NamibRand proudly informs visitors of its certification as an International Dark Sky Reserve.

the sky.

May 28 - Conjunction of Venus and Jupiter. These two bright planets will be within one degree of each other in the evening sky, with Venus to the right. The planet Mercury will also be visible slightly above Venus. During the period from May 22 to June 1 these three planets will create striking alignments in the west after sunset.

June 12 - Mercury at Greatest Eastern Elongation. The planet Mercury will be at its furthest angle from the Sun, known as greatest elongation. This is the best time to try to view Mercury as it will be at its highest point in the night sky after sunset.

June 23 - Biggest Full Moon of 2013. This evening the Moon is almost at its closest to the Earth in its orbit, causing it to appear slightly larger than normal full moons. The term supermoon has been coined to describe this occurrence.

July 27, 28 - Southern Delta Aquarids Meteor Shower. The Southern Delta Aquarids can produce up to 20 meteors per hour at its peak. It consists of dust left behind by comets Marsden and Kracht. The shower runs annually from July 12 to August 23. It peaks this year on the night of July 27 and morning of July 28. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Aquarius, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

The first two bright comets of 2013, comets Lemmon and C/2011 L4 PANSTARRS, were interesting objects to view with binoculars in February and March but they did not brighten as much as was hoped. Looking ahead, in mid-August Comet Ison will emerge into the dawn sky in the constellation Cancer shining around 11th magnitude, bright enough to spot in amateur telescopes. It could dominate the night sky from November, 2013 until early 2014 but currently it is not brightening as quickly as expected. While it may not be the "comet of the century" some had predicted, it still may put on a spectacular show.

Weekly updates about currently visible comets can be found at <http://www.aerith.net/comet/weekly/current.html>.

George Tucker

Large lightning fire in the dunes

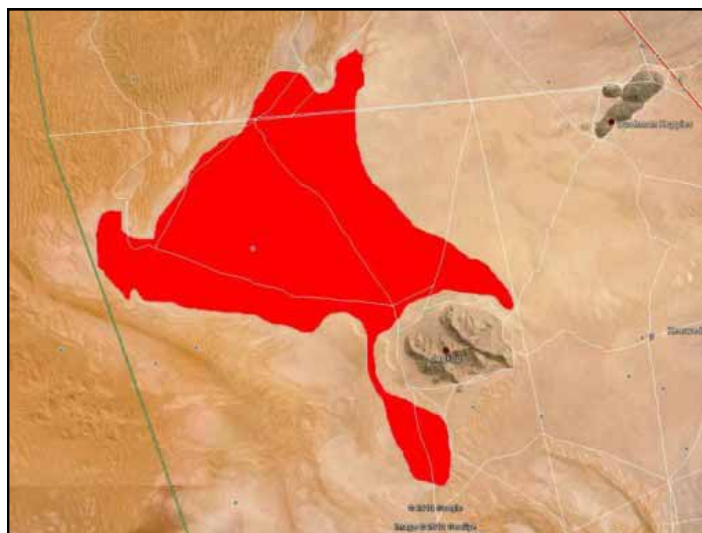
On 24 January 2013, after a light rain shower, Sossusvlei Desert Lodge (SDL) reported a fire near the Kwessiegat house to me. I immediately went out to have a look and found that it was south of Kwessiegat and spreading slowly in a south-westerly direction (towards the western side of Jagkop). As it was a natural fire we did not attempt to fight it but did monitor it closely.

Due to concerns by adjoining farm owners and managers to the north, I agreed to stop the fire from spreading any further in that direction. Two teams from Wolwedans, a team from Sesriem and the Keerweder team then put out the flames that were spreading to the north behind Cobra Dam. Soon after that Peter Woolfe, Clutch Esterhuizen and Werner Lourens and their teams joined as we put out the flames on the northern flank of the burned area. We finished with this exercise at 03h00 the next morning, and while the fire was still burning towards the south-east, we decided to monitor the rest of the



Above: The January 2013 fire burning southwards, in the direction of Wolwedans.

Below: The green flush already starting on 2 April after the good rains of 23 and 30 March 2013.



The extent of the January 2013 fire, from Kwessiegat in the north and around Jagkop in the west, as well as southwards towards Wolwedans.

fire from Keerweder. The other teams that helped then left for their respective bases.

The fire continued to burn until past sunrise, when Elton Vries and I went out again to where we still saw smoke (south of Jagkop). When we got there we found that the fire was burning against the wind at a slow but steady pace, towards the Wolwedans Lodge. We immediately put out that fire and called on the Wolwedans team for assistance. When they arrived we moved on to the next fire which was burning west towards the Park boundary. We followed this fire closely and monitored it until it eventually burned itself out at the boundary fence. The last flame went out at 13h00 on 25 January.

In total, an estimated 6,000 ha burned (see map above). Hopefully, if we receive some good rainfall soon, this burned area will offer good green fodder for the animals.

This fire has again underlined the great importance of good communication during a fire on the Reserve. Another problem is the fact that some people arrive at a fire but have no idea what to do. This may waste resources and energy and could put peoples' lives at risk. To address these problems we strongly urge everyone to attend our fire drills, in order to learn and share ideas on fire fighting rules and techniques.

Lastly, what also caused problems was the differences in policies between the Reserve and its neighbours regarding fire. It is Reserve policy that if a fire is started by any natural causes, we do not intervene unless it is a threat to people, infrastructure and/or neighbouring farms, whereas neighbours may feel threatened by "wild fires" for various reasons and therefore opt to put the fire out immediately.

These issues can, and I'm sure will be, addressed at forthcoming NAM-PLACE meetings, to find common ground between NamibRand and neighbours on policies regarding natural fires.

Quintin Hartung

News from the South

Greetings to all from what has been a very warm and dry South. Thus far the only rain we have received was at the beginning of March and that was only in the immediate area around the Aandstêr house, a grand total of 7 mm in all. Saffier house received 9 mm and apart from that there has been 1 mm here and there, but nothing to inspire or cool the temperatures. On a couple of occasions we have measured 47 degrees, and have consistently measured over 40 degrees. These exceptionally high temperatures are probably why we have not had rain, so we can just hope that come April/May and it cools a little, we will get traditionally late Namib rain.

On a lighter note, the NamibRand staff Christmas party was held at Aandstêr on 8 December 2012. NamibRand provided a generous braai of lamb chops and boerewors, expertly braaied by Quintin Hartung and myself, and Vanessa Mouton (Quintin's fiancée) kindly made a huge potato salad at the special request of the staff. Pudding was ice cream, which was a big hit with the children. They all settled down to watch videos - with an environmental theme for a change – which were well received. We were treated to Christmas carols sung in Nama – always special. All in all a wonderful, happy day.

Some remarkable sightings have also been recorded: at the top of the list, over 100 Lappet-faced Vultures at Two Pumps on Springbokvlakte, and on another occasion 52 at the middle reservoir on Dina. When I came to the Namib some 13 years ago, to see even one was cause for celebration. Another "first" for me was on my way to Maltahöhe where, along the Dina fence adjacent to the C27, there must have been 2000-3000 springbok. I have never seen anything like it. It appeared that they wanted to go east, probably in search of better browsing conditions, and this would support the theory that in fact their ancient migratory route would have taken them at least to the escarpment and probably up the Duwisib River. They say elephants never forget! Leopard spoor have been seen a couple of times now on the road next to the Aandstêr house.

The big news is that the building work at Aandstêr is now underway again. The first project is to finish the work on the shed, after which work will commence on fixing up the old Hunter's Cottage across the garden from the main house. All systems go, here in the South! A cellphone repeater has also been erected at Springbokvlakte, supplying full reception and internet to the house. Strangely there is only one place, about 1m², where the signal can be attained, nowhere else. We can thank Johannes and his determination for finding this one spot!

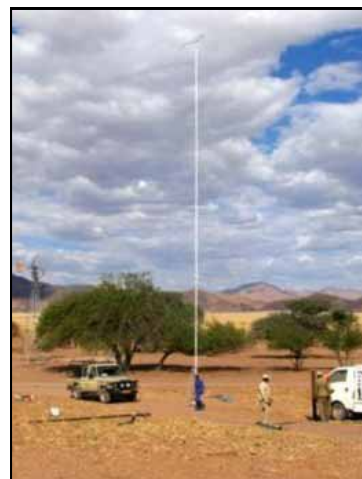
Finally, Telecom Namibia came and loaded 2,500 kg of copper wire, valued at about N\$166,600.00. No wonder they have a theft problem. They also loaded the copper-plated wire. Each roll was weighed and recorded and a receipt issued. I was quite impressed.

We wish you all a great three months till the next issue, and hopefully some late rains.

Peter Woolfe



*Top to bottom:
The staff and their families
enjoyed their Christmas party
at Aandstêr.
The children were treated to
watching entertaining
environmental films.
Building work on the Aandstêr
shed.
Erecting a tall cellphone
repeater at Springbokvlakte in
the one single spot where
reception can be attained.*



Photos: Peter Woolfe

Impressions of my internship at NamibRand



It was a wonderful experience for me to spend time on NamibRand Nature Reserve last year. I am very grateful for this opportunity made possible by NamibRand and the Grassland Foundation back in Nebraska, US. I also appreciated the friendliness and hospitality everyone showed to me.

I enjoyed my time in the desert and became quite attached to its scenery and the abundance of wildlife found there. There were stunning views to be had everywhere. I enjoyed the ever-changing landscape that morphed from plains to mountains to dunes so quickly! There was something new to see every day and it made for a remarkable experience.

I especially enjoyed participating in the activities of the Reserve. I learned from the everyday maintenance and upkeep and other management actions. From checking waterholes to hiking the Losberg, actively experiencing NamibRand was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I will keep those memories forever.

The appreciation of wild places is even greater when people are educated about where they live and what they see. Encountering the desert through Tok Tokkie Trails and taking in the landscape with Wolwedans can be valuable experiences for creating an awareness of how seemingly empty places teem with life. Educating young people about sustainable living practices and the world around them, such as what happens at NaDEET, is very important.

As part of this learning experience I identified many ideas to take back with me to Nebraska. The formation of associations among landowners is a powerful tool for conservation and could be beneficial to the ecology of the Great Plains and the livelihoods of farmers there. One of the most striking features of the Reserve is the absence of fences and other man-made features on the landscape. It makes NamibRand a truly wild place.

Lars Anderson



A closer look at Bibron's gecko.

Photo: Lars Anderson

Practical experience at NamibRand



At the start of 2013 I had the pleasure of working as an intern ranger on NamibRand Nature Reserve for two months. I am currently studying for a BA Environmental Management through UNISA and the practical experience I gained on the Reserve gave me deeper insight into natural resource management especially in such an inhospitable area of Namibia.

To experience the commitment and hard working ethos of the Namib Rand staff in such a harsh environment, where the mercury hits 40 at regular intervals, has inspired me to work harder at achieving my goals.

From a practical side I gained knowledge of the fauna and flora of the Namib, the use of solar power as a practical and alternative energy source, underground water resource usage and how the natural and human environment is shaped by the climate and geology of the area. It was very interesting to note the behaviour of the animals - e.g. the relationship between a lack of rain and increased aggressiveness by oryx bulls at the water holes - and how the species are interlinked. The slightest change in one species due to natural factors or human intervention had an impact on other creatures, e.g. the lack of rain has led to more kudu and springbok deaths on fences on the road corridors, resulting in more food for the scavenger species such as vultures and jackals. It was also very apparent to me that we as humans are the major stakeholders and that our actions can have dire consequences for the environment if not managed in an environmentally conscious manner.

I wish to thank Nils Odendaal for allowing me to be part of an exceptional team and world class environmental conservation project. I also thank Mike and Ann Scott and Quintin Hartung for their support and knowledge, and especially Abraham Tsaobeb and Elton Vries, who kept me entertained and taught me about life on the west of the Nubib mountains. I congratulate NamibRand Nature Reserve on their successes of the past, present and the future. Keep up the good work!

Coetzee Heydenrych



A typically Pro-Namib vista, centred on Ysterkop Mountain.

Photo: Coetzee Heydenrych

Little Bugs

The January 2013 issue of the "Little Bugs" newsletter is downloadable from www.little-bugs.org. Little Bugs is an early childhood development centre created by Namib Sky Balloon Safaris and offers free education to children in the local community of Sossusvlei (see November 2012 issue of this newsletter). The centre introduces a safe, healthy, stimulating, child-friendly environment, for quality Early Childhood Education, accessible for all, in cooperation with the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare, the Namib Sky Community Foundation and donors.

In the latest newsletter you can read about:

- Colourful Christmas tree
- Christmas in the desert
- Raising funds
- A special visit from Father Christmas
- Renovating the outdoor play area
- Plans for our new school

Little Bugs would like to inform our followers that the plans are out for our new school. It's a small step for our "little bugs" and a giant step for Sossusvlei. The expansion of our project represents a huge transformation in this remote area and will represent a better future to the next generation. Thanks to Stauch+Partners Architects, we will be able to provide better conditions and a healthy environment for these children (Email: info@little-bugs.org—www.little-bugs.org).

Andreia Hesemans



Some of the "little bugs" during a gardening session.



The conceptual planning for the expansion of the "Little Bugs" school.

Photos: Little Bugs



Titus Nangola, the new guide at the Family Hideout.

Welcome to the Family Hideout, Titus!

After four and a half years with us, Ricardo Tjiho left the employ of the NamibRand Family Hideout in February this year. We were sad to see him go, but we were also fortunate to find (what we are sure will be) a very able replacement for Ricardo, Titus Nangolo, who started with us on 1 March 2013.

Titus has a National Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management from the Polytechnic of Namibia, as well as a driver's licence, both of which will assist him in ably serving the guests of the Family Hideout and Hideout Campsite. He will also represent our interests at Reserve meetings and gatherings, when we can't attend personally.

We welcome him to the NamibRand family, and wish him an enjoyable and fulfilling stay with us!

Mandy Brückner



Photos: Family Hideout

Slow down, leave the stress and pace of our high-tech world behind you for a while and relax at the Family Hideout —only you and the desert ...

Guide and rangers' corner

WOLWEDANS

This observation was made by Simon Hamola, a Wolwedans field guide. While on his afternoon safari drive on 24 January 2013, he came across the Endangered cheetah, a rather rare sighting in the Reserve. This cat was strolling with time at Draaihoek, in the NRNR. The guests on board were Dr Phil Tanner and his wife Barbara.

The puff adder is a favourite snake for most of the field guides including rangers. Puff adders give them the chance to get as close as they can, unlike their relatives the cobras and mambas. On top of it all, the puff adder is one of the deadliest snakes in Africa. It contains cytotoxic venom that is responsible for cell destroying. So, when seen, be very cautious, very slow moving, but well calculated in approach. This snake was spotted by Simon Hamola, a Wolwedans field guide, on 11 February 2013. He was on his way from the Dune Lodge, and the snake was right crossing the road, just before old camp site.

*Information provided by: Simon Hamola, field guide
Compiled and edited by: Mbangu Lucas, senior field guide*



Senior field guide Mbangu Lucas (Wolwedans; left) and ranger Peter Nuugonya (Sossusvlei Desert Lodge) provided the sightings on this page.

SOSSUSVLEI DESERT LODGE

The spotted hyaena is one of the most difficult animals to see in the area but we were so lucky to see this one on the road early in the morning on our way to the big dune at Sossusvlei, early in February 2013. It was photographed by a guest from Hong Kong.

Peter Nuugonya, ranger



Photo: Barbara Tanner



Photo: Simon Hamola



Photos: Yita Chng

*Above: A graceful cheetah at Draaihoek.
Below: A huge puff adder at the Dune Lodge.*

Above and below: An excellent sighting of a spotted hyaena near Sossusvlei.



News@NaDEET

NaDEET had another successful year hosting more than 30 groups at the Centre. In the third trimester of 2012, we saw four more returning school groups, three of which made the trip to NaDEET Centre their annual outing. We also had two adult groups: a workshop-Namibian Business Innovation Centre (NBIC) from the Polytechnic of Namibia and a German-Namibian Youth Exchange Group visiting us. Since the beginning of this year we have already hosted four school groups of which three are returning schools, Ruimte Primary School, WJD Cloete JSS and St George's College. The Centre is fully booked for the rest of the year with returning schools and a lot of first comers. We are hoping that by the end of this year we will reach our goal to have had all the schools in the Hardap Region attend our environmental education programme.

Towards the end of 2012, thanks to a generous donation of solar panels by InnoSun, NaDEET started with the construction of the "Solar Park" at NaDEET Centre which is now completed and that increased our power output. This allowed us to move the solar panels that were at the Centre to NaDEET Base increasing our electricity production there as well. This extra energy will give us an opportunity for more activities and projects. Underneath the "Solar Park" we created an education and information platform and a curio corner where participants, tourists and any other visitors at NaDEET Centre can learn more about us, our activities and projects.

Two issues of the *Bush Telegraph* were produced last year; *Sustainable Energy for All* and *Deserts: Places of Extremes*. Our *It's Time to...* series has a new addition as well: an environmental learning pack entitled *It's Time to Grow*. It is aimed for children aged 4-7 enrolled in early childhood education up to Grade 1 learners, depending on the level of their education. The printed pack comes with four booklets (on the topics of water, sun, recycling and animals & plants), a pack of crayons, a growth chart and seed disc. Educational institutions can contact NaDEET in order to receive free copies.

On another note, NaDEET's capacity building project is really paying off. Two former interns - Viktoria Endjala from the Polytechnic of Namibia and Retatuhe Tjikotoke from the Agricultural Training Centre Krumhuk (ATCK) - have returned to NaDEET as employees. Thank you to the wonderful partnership NaDEET has with the above mentioned institutions. NaDEET is happy to have them again as part of the team.

Viktoria Endjala



Ed: NaDEET is 10 years old this year, as reflected in the new logo (left)—more of this in our next issue!



Top: Ruimte Primary school boys solar cooking.
Centre: The new solar park at NaDEET.
Bottom: St George's learners looking at information in the solar park.

Photos: NaDEET photo library

What does our wedge-snouted lizard have in common with the Sinai agama?

A fascinating study, entitled "Toes-up' in Sinai agamas: what for?" is the product of a recent collaboration under the auspices of the Zoological Society of Israel, involving a NamibRand study and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Tel Aviv University and University of Haifa (Israel), the Museum für Tierkunde (Dresden), Uppsala University, (Sweden) and other researchers in Israel and The Netherlands.

Sinai agamas, *Pseudotrapelus* spp. are conspicuous lizards in the rocky deserts of Egypt, Israel and Jordan. The males' blue nuptial colouration attracts much photography. The description of *P. aqabensis* by D Melnikov and associates in 2012 stimulated widespread inspection of such photographs.

Many of the photographs showed the agamas standing with hind-limbs leaning on the heels, toes pointing up. Often the front fingers, too, were raised (Fig. 1). In some cases also the tail was held elevated off the ground (Fig. 2).

We considered two explanations of the "toes up" posture:

- It could be a behavioural signal. But usually no other individual was in sight, and we found no precedent in the literature.

- It may be a response to heat. Often the photographers reported having photographed in hot weather. We found reports of desert Agamidae and Iguanidae that in hot conditions raise the toes and fingers.

The function is often interpreted as thermo-regulatory, dissipating body heat. Occasionally the tail, too, is held off the ground, presumably participating in the behaviour. However, in the wedge-snouted lizard *Meroles cuneirostris* of the Namibian desert, the process was investigated and quantified in the laboratory by Maria Wilén (also see previous issues of this newsletter). At least, in this case, the function of raising the digits in heat is apparently thermo-protective (Fig. 3).

Further research of these phenomena is required. Moreover, if other Israeli desert lizards have the digits-up behaviour, how would their mesic-zone relatives respond to experimental heat?

Yehudah Werner, Gilad Ben-zvi, Sergé Bogaerts, Amos Bouskila, Ester Inbar, Tal Levanony, Adili Naor, Yael Olek, Roy Talbi, and Maria Wilén (contributed by Maria Wilén)



1. Male *Pseudotrapelus* sp. (twice), toes up, on the left also fingers up, Petra, Jordan, on a hot day, 8 August 2005.

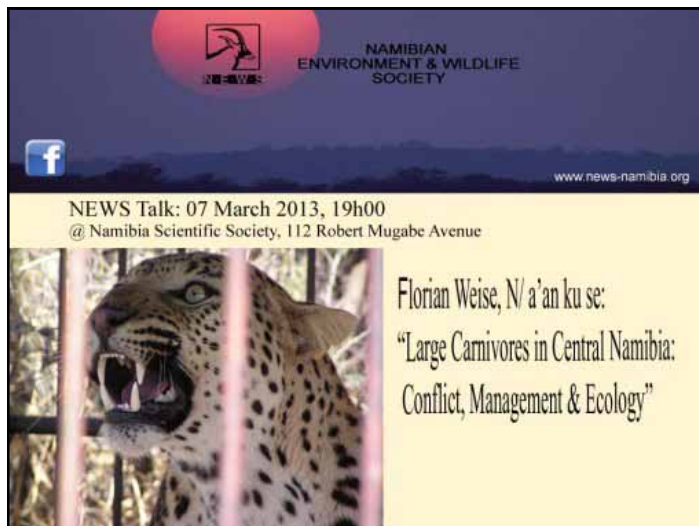


2. Male *Pseudotrapelus* sp., toes up, tail up, on plastic tube, at Sedom, southern Israel, on a hot day, 24 May 2010 at 10h18.



3. Wedge-snouted lizard (*Meroles cuneirostris*) from Namibia in experiment, toes up, surface temperature 69.8°C after 50 sec, Core 40.6°C.

Large carnivores in central Namibia: conflict, management and ecology



Following an invitation of Tok Tokkie's Barbara Wayrauch, who is also involved with the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS), Florian Weise (principal researcher of the N/a'an ku sê Foundation) presented a public talk on large carnivores in early March 2013. The presentation was titled "Large Carnivores in Central Namibia: Conflict, Management and Ecology" and the rooms at the Scientific Society in Windhoek were full with farmers, hunters, tourism entrepreneurs, fellow researchers and other interested members of the public.

Florian provided information from five years of work with Namibian landowners who often experience conflict with cheetahs, leopards and hyaenas. He summarised that probably three out of four landowners at some stage incur serious financial losses from large predators on their land but that many people are trying to reduce these conflicts in non-lethal ways. This can, for example, be achieved through improvements in livestock husbandry (for cattle especially during the calving seasons), use of guardian animals like dogs and donkeys, effective fences or any form of suitable deterrents. Many landowners manage to reduce their losses by up to 90% immediately when introducing new management techniques. As a result, a lot of livestock farmers become more tolerant of free-ranging predators. Nonetheless, Florian also produced evidence that, on average, approximately one large carnivore (either cheetah, leopard or hyaena) is lethally removed from every commercial farm every 24 months. Looking at about 3 500 commercial properties altogether the impact on the free-ranging populations is obvious. Florian argued that such removals need to become more selective and less indiscriminate in the future and that scientific monitoring (for example through GPS satellite collars) can play an important role in making large carnivore management more sustainable.

From his farmland studies, Florian showed that wildlife numbers on private properties in central Namibia are generally healthy and livestock depredation by large carnivores is usually a function of inadequate husbandry. He made a clear distinction between opportunistic and habitual livestock

raiders and stressed that the avenues for management of these animals must be variable and case-specific. For instance, through the use of intensive monitoring, Florian assessed the suitability of relocation as a conflict mitigation tool for opportunistic conflict predators and he pointed out that the post-release ecology of cheetah and leopard is inherently different. Cheetahs will travel long distances in a new environment and often settle only 9-12 months after release. Leopards, on the other hand, explore their novel habitat merely for an average of 6-8 weeks and establish solid ranges rather quickly. Leopards also show much higher survival after relocation than cheetahs do, but both species reproduce successfully in their new environments. Florian demonstrated that very few of the translocated animals come into real conflict with landowners again, but that this technique is very expensive and should therefore be limited to certain conditions including significant improvements of livestock husbandry on the original "conflict" farm.

NamibRand has for many years been very supportive of and proactive in large carnivore rehabilitation in Namibia. Florian has been working with the Reserve on re-introductions of both cheetah and leopard, and many of the data presented during the talk originate from this strong collaboration and the years of joint work on NamibRand. Florian stressed that the Reserve provides a successful case study of large carnivore conservation at the landscape scale in this country and the potential economic value of perceived "conflict predators", for example, for tourism initiatives. This value still appears to be under-utilised and much more work is necessary to improve the tolerance and acceptance of large carnivores on commercial farms in general. However, many private landowners already attempt to benefit from iconic large predators and Florian gave insights into the many different ways this can be realised.

Florian Weise



A recent camera trap photograph of the leopard female released by N/a'an ku sê on Kulala in December 2009. She is now on Neuras and has had her first litter of two in late 2011. She is shown above with one of the cubs, now approx. 13 months old, and both look just stunning. She demonstrated that some cats do stay "under the radar" and are not as "high maintenance" as most of the cheetahs are.

The black-footed cat in Namibia

The Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia is looking for distribution and locality records of the black-footed cat (*Felis nigripes*) in Namibia.

The project needs your help in collecting records of sightings on your farm or property in order to determine more fine scale distribution data on the species and to identify areas where the cats are resident and can be located for further studies.

The black-footed cat

The black-footed cat or small-spotted cat (klein gekolde kat/miershooptier) is the smallest and possibly the rarest of the African felines, endemic to southern Africa. The species is found primarily in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and possibly southern Angola. Although its predicted range extends over large parts of central and southern Namibia, few locality records are documented (i.e. only two records in the National Museum of Namibia). It is one of the lesser studied wild cats of Africa and is listed as Vulnerable under IUCN and under CITES Appendix I.

The species inhabits dry, open savannah, grasslands and Karoo semi-desert with sparse shrub and tree cover and a mean annual rainfall of between 100 and 500 mm, at altitudes of 0-2,000 m. Preferred habitat is short, open grasslands with an abundance of rodents and ground-roosting birds.

Objectives of the study

- Collect distribution data
- Educate and raise awareness for this small wild cat
- Find strong-holds for the conservation of the black-footed cat in Namibia

Distribution records will be collected through questionnaire surveys, assembling locality records throughout Namibia (e.g. camera trap data, observation records from private and national parks, museum records etc.). The project will raise awareness for the species through posters displayed throughout Namibia and general environmental education (e.g. attending farmer's meetings, articles in newspapers and magazines, radio live reads and interviews etc.). Conservation threats of the species in Namibia will be investigated.

Conservation

The project aims to involve the farming community throughout Namibia and to attempt to determine perception/attitudes and the degree of tolerance towards the cat. Attitudes will be defined as tolerance towards the species, the level of perceived threat to livestock or other animals by the species and to what extent the farmer or land owner will go to eliminate the threat (i.e. opportunistic persecution of the cat or active baiting and trapping). Conservation threats may be linked directly to attitudes and perception of the species.



Photo: Terry Whittaker

The black-footed cat (klein gekolde kat/miershooptier).

Identification

One of the challenges of the project will be to distinguish records of the black-footed cat from the similar African wild cat (*Felis libyca*; vaalboskat), serval (tierboskat) and small-spotted genet (Muskeljaatkat).

Distinguishing features of the black-footed cat: smaller than the African wild cat; shorter tail; back of the ears plain-coloured (not reddish); broad head with prominent ears; boldly spotted black body pattern, shortish legs with thick dark stripes and black soles; spoor: 2.5cm; mainly nocturnal and solitary.

Have you seen a black-footed cat?

Your record will help us to understand the distribution and conservation status of the black-footed cat in Namibia.

Please report your sighting with the following information:

- Observer's name and contact details
- Location of sighting: name of farm or location (GPS or nearest town)
- Date of sighting
- Number of cats
- Frequency of sighting (i.e. regular sightings on farm or in an area)
- Road and other mortalities

Please report the information to:

Martina Küsters
Black-footed Cat Research Project Namibia
P.O. Box 11391
Klein Windhoek
Tel: (+264) 081 361 0982
Email: bfcats@mail.com or kusters.m@hotmail.com
Martina Küsters

Funded by



and



Photo supplied by: Wendy Turner



A distribution record: a camera trap photo of the black-footed cat on the Etosha plains.

Interesting sightings and photo gallery



Left & centre: A dainty spider was found on these flowers (centre) at Boscia 1 June 2011—a perfect camouflage (Ann Scott).
Right: How did this huge scorpion lose the tip of its tail? (Lars Anderson).



Left & centre: Peter Woolfe submitted these photographs of an owl, taken at Hyaena Water by Alessandro Araldi in December 2012. Could this be a Cape Eagle-Owl (CEO) - uncommon in our area? Liz Komen of NARREC comments: For CEO, look for orange eyes, mottled rufous/reddish brown plumage; and broad black, white and brownish barring on the chest. Spotted Eagle-Owls (SEO) sometimes have orangish eyes and are also sometimes rufous brown; they have fine barring on the chest. My gut response is SEO, the western form.
Right: Spotted Eagle-Owl at Keerweder (Coetzee Heydenrych).



Left: A wonderful rare sighting of a Grey-headed Kingfisher, seen at Keerweder within hours of the rains on 30 April 2013. Normally this species is found only in the northern parts of Namibia (Quintin Hartung & Mike Scott).
Centre: Could this be a (juvenile) white morph of the Booted Eagle? (Quintin Hartung & Mike Scott).
Right: NamibRand's latest baby giraffe at Draaihoek on 23 December 2012 (Quintin Hartung).



Left: Animals queue patiently at the waterholes amid clouds of dust (Ann Scott).
Centre: Three species march towards the Keerweder waterhole—Ludwig's Bustard, red hartebeest and oryx—intent on a battle for dominance during the dry period (Ann Scott).
Right: One of the tiny new baby oryx born in March 2013 (Quintin Hartung).

Introducing Hotspur



Photo: Ann Scott

The male mountain zebra in the outstanding photograph on the left, taken at the Keerweder waterhole, is called Hotspur. In the photograph he is engaged in a series of contests with other male zebra and uttering the loud aggressive call that is typical of males in these highly charged situations. The unusual thing about Hotspur is that he is carrying out this behaviour not in competition with males of his own species, but with plains zebra (the local variant known as Burchell's zebra). As readers of Barking Gecko may know from previous issues, he is one of the male mountain zebra who has become fixated on plains zebra and who follows their wanderings instead of bonding with members of his own species. This appears to be a sort of bonding error that will potentially tell us a lot about mate choice in this species and such incidents are being followed closely in the study of mountain zebra being carried out on NamibRand.

But why "Hotspur"? Well, mountain zebra are individually recognised in the study, using small variations in stripe patterns, and Hotspur has a striking version of a stripe with a "spur" – the odd shaped stripe at the top of his right flank. And, in addition, Sir Harry Hotspur was a famous fourteenth century English knight who spent much of his life engaged in combat that was both chivalrous (reputedly) and violent against the French and the Scots. So, Hotspur seems a perfect name for our spurred mountain zebra, who similarly seems fated to spend much of his time in combat with males of another kind (with apologies to all French and Scottish readers who of course have nothing in common with Burchell's zebras).

Morris Gosling

Thank you

Many thanks to those of you who have contributed to this issue of The Barking Gecko by providing articles/information: Lars Anderson, Mandy Brückner, Viktoria Endjala, Quintin Hartung, Andreia Hesemans, Coetzee Heydenrych, Martina Küsters, Lucas Mbangu, Peter Nuugonya, Nils Odendaal, Dr George Tucker, Florian Weise, Maria Wilén and Peter Woolfe. We would also like to thank all those who so generously share their photographs and interesting sightings! Thank you to Mike Scott and Nils Odendaal for editorial inputs.

The Barking Gecko is your newsletter and, as always, we invite you to keep on sending us your contributions of news and views, short reports, sightings, artwork and photographs.

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